

Mk. 7:14-23 “Inside Out”

For the Children: It’s hard to imagine that what you eat could make you good or bad. In the OT, if you ate pork or crab-meat, you would be “unclean.” But what made you unclean was not the food itself: it was the breaking of God’s law. Perhaps your parents have told you not to go out of their sight when you are somewhere near a river. It’s not that there is anything sinful about your parents not being able to see you. But they gave the rule for a good reason. What is sinful is thinking you know better. It shows what your attitude is, what’s in your heart. The Lord is more interested in what’s in the heart than in what you eat or what distance you are from your parents. **Questions:** What are some examples of things that come out of people – their words or behaviour – that show they are not right with the Lord? What are some examples of things we do on the outside that might show we are trying to serve Him? Can you think of things we might take in that could harm us spiritually?

Introduction:

First Point: What Goes In

- **The Jewish Misunderstanding:** The ceremonial law was given to help Israel understand holiness and separation from sin. It also kept them apart from those who did not obey God. But they came to think they were superior to others, based on their outward observance of these ceremonies
- **A Hard Nut to Crack:** This was such a deep and widespread problem, the Lord calls them to pay attention and understand (v. 14). Even the disciples struggle. They see Jesus’ words as a “parable” or “riddle” (v. 18). Externalism and works-righteousness are a constant struggle for us, too
- **Food Does Not Defile:** Nothing from the outside, by way of food, drink etc., is able to defile us on the inside. Likewise, mere external compliance with such things does not create or guarantee inner holiness. Holiness starts in the heart, and bears fruit in external behavior. Of course, things that we take in that encourage sin, *can* affect the heart e.g. pornography. But food, drink etc are not sinful as such. This was a riddle to the disciples, because they were used to seeing disobedience to the ceremonial law as creating uncleanness
- **A Digestive Argument:** The Lord points out, however, that food is taken into the stomach and intestines, then eliminated. It does not go to the heart (v. 19). How could it defile the heart?
- **The Intimation of Change:** Mark adds that this teaching implied the change in the New Covenant, that the ceremonial laws, such as the dietary restrictions, would come to an end. In the OT, the Lord taught about holiness/unholiness in terms of obedience/disobedience to both ceremonial and moral law; in the NT, holiness was explained simply in reference to the moral law

Second Point: What Comes Out

- **The Other Side of the Coin:** At the same time, what lives in the heart (the inner aspects of man) can affect outward behaviour – words and actions. “Evil thoughts,” something that occurs inwardly, often result in sinful actions outwardly (v. 21)
- **A List of Sins:** The Lord gives some examples of how a heart that is not right can cause all sorts of problems. The list of sins in vss. 21-22 covers virtually the whole of the “Second Table of the Law.” It includes both sins of desire and attitude, as well as outward words and actions. The defilement of the heart causes all these other things that defile a man. The desire to disobey, even in outward things, shows a defiled heart. Sinful words and actions also feed back into the heart and add to its defilement
- **The Antidote:** The world seeks to persuade us to evil actions outwardly, in order to corrupt the heart. When the Lord gives us a heart for Him, we will fight against sin and pursue holiness, out of love, fear and gratitude to God. Outwardly, we will concentrate on the good things of God
- **The Struggle:** Though the inner man God has created rejoices in the good, yet there is also an old, sinful nature inside us. The new man is the one who defines us, but the old man creates an ongoing struggle. But the Lord Jesus gives us true cleansing and ultimately frees us from the struggle

Conclusion: